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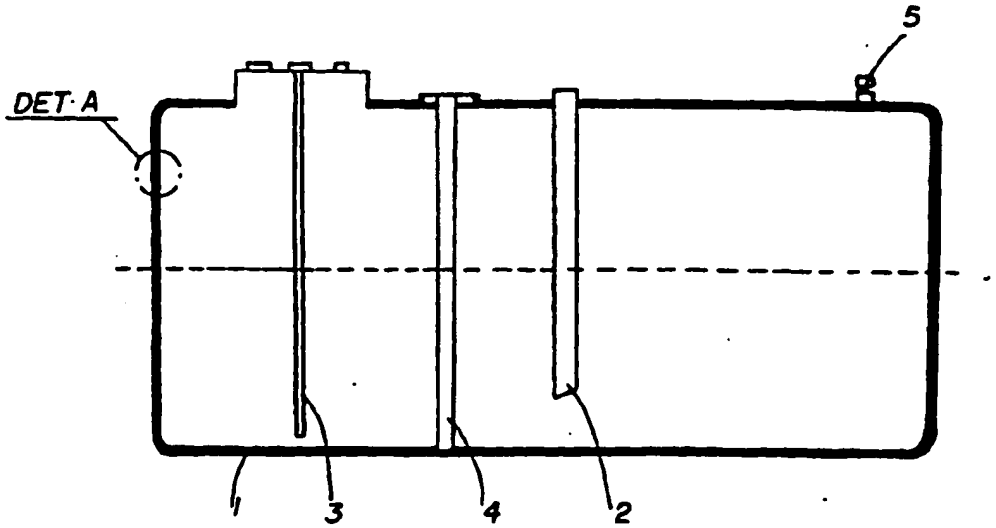
(54) Title: AN UNDERGROUND RESERVOIR FOR STORING LIQUID PRODUCTS AND A PROCESS FOR MANUFACTURING AN UNDERGROUND RESERVOIR



(57) Abstract: The present invention relates to an underground reservoir for storing liquid products comprising an inner or main reservoir made from a material having known strength characteristics, such as a carbon steel typically used in the industry, and an outer or secondary reservoir comprising a coating, said coating comprising an iinner layer made from an impervious paper and an outer polyurethane-based layer. The present invention also relates to a process for manufacturing said reservoir.

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Specification

"AN UNDERGROUND RESERVOIR FOR STORING LIQUID PRODUCTS AND A PROCESS FOR MANUFACTURING AN UNDERGROUND RESERVOIR"

Background of the Invention

Field of the Invention

The present invention is generally directed to storage devices and, more specifically, to a tank or reservoir particularly designed for storing liquid products below the ground surface which is provided with an outer anticorrosion protective cover for efficiently controlling and monitoring an eventual leakage of the stored liquid. Under another aspect, the present invention is directed to a process for the manufacture of such underground reservoir having an outer anticorrosion protective layer.

Description of the Prior Art

A problem with tanks or reservoirs used for storing liquid products at a level below the ground surface, such as those used in fuel sale stations, is that they are frequently structurally deteriorated in view of the aggressive environment in which the same are used.

Indeed, the relatively high corrosion degree of the environment surrounding the tank attacks the material from which the reservoir is manufactured and tends to speed up the corrosion thereof, resulting in a general degradation of its structure which may lead to the occurrence of leaks.

An underground reservoir structurally corroded, besides allowing the leakage of the product stored inside same and, as a consequence, the inadmissible contamination of the surrounding environment, thus increasing the well known risks of pollution, can allow the water to infiltrate into same, what can hamper the quality of the product being commercialized.

Since the costs related to the replacement of such an underground reservoir for storing liquid products can be prohibitively high, without mentioning the problems resulting from the required partial interruption of the traffic along the surface roads close to the place where the same is being installed, a regular replacement of such reservoirs is unfeasible.

A solution which has previously been attempted to solve the foregoing problem was the installation of continuous cathodic protection anodes, such as cable, tape and tubular

anodes, buried close to the underground metallic structures such as pipes or storage tanks for protecting same against corrosion.

The anodes provide protection for the reservoir by increasing the electric potential of the ground surrounding same through the application of a direct current to the anode and the ground at a potential enough to keep the reservoir under a negative voltage with relation to the anode and, thus, to protect the metallic surface of the reservoir against any attack.

Typically, the anode is encapsulated in a carbon material such as powdered coke particles to increase the flow of the input current. The anodes are flexible and deemed to be "continuous" in view of the fact that they are elongated and tubular in shape, and can be laid along the reservoir.

This solution, however, is too much expensive and does not fully eliminate the problem of corrosion caused by chemicals on the outer metallic surface of the underground reservoir being used as a supplementary protection means against corrosion in grounds having a high potential.

Another solution previously proposed to address the problem of the attack against the inner and outer walls of the reservoirs was the manufacture of coated or jacketed tanks or reservoirs, that is, having an inner or primary compartment for storing the liquid product and an outer or secondary compartment having slightly larger inner dimensions than those of the inner reservoir, the purpose of which is to function as a protection shield for the inner reservoir.

Typically, in accordance with the constructive dispositions known in the state of the art, such coated or jacketed reservoirs are comprised of tanks having a double steel-steel wall comprising an inner reservoir made from carbon steel in the interior of which the liquid product is stored, and an outer reservoir which is also made from carbon steel and serves as a protection against the corrosion of the main reservoir by agents from the ground and also as a containment barrier in the event of a leakage. There is a minimum gap (interstice) between the two tanks within which a sensor for detecting the presence of liquids is installed on its lowermost point, in order to monitor any leakage that may eventually take place.

Another solution mostly used in view of its lower

cost than that of the double steel walls tank is the use of a coated or jacketed reservoir in which the outer or secondary tank is made from fibreglass.

However, such coated or jacketed reservoirs in accordance with the known state of the art present several technical and/or functional disadvantages, among which the following ones can be cited:

The jacketed reservoirs provided with double steel walls are too heavy, thus making the installation of same difficult and expensive due to the need of using larger capacity lifting devices (cranes).

Another problem of such jacketed reservoirs provided with double steel walls is that the process for manufacturing same is laborious and the time for producing same is too long.

The drawback of such coated or jacketed reservoirs provided with double walls made from steel and fibreglass is the fact that the production process involving fibreglass is unhealthy and dangerous because of the toxic and explosive/flammable nature of the materials used in this process, such as acetone, catalysts and aromatic compounds, and thus the whole industrial process should be dealt with carefully, from the storage of raw materials to its application, which should be made in a place provided with an exhaustion and fire-fighting system.

Therefore, there is a need in the art for an underground reservoir for storing a liquid product which provides a solution for the problems discussed above related to the coated or jacketed reservoirs known in the state of the art.

Any discussion of documents, acts, materials, devices, articles or the like which has been included in the present specification is solely for the purpose of providing a context for the present invention. It is not to be taken as an admission that any or all of these matters form part of the prior art base or were common general knowledge in the field relevant to the present invention as it existed before the priority date of each claim of this application.

Summary of the Invention

In accordance with a first aspect, the present invention provides an underground reservoir for storing liquid products, consisting of an inner, main reservoir, and an outer, secondary reservoir consisting of a coating layer, said coating layer consisting of an inner layer made from a paper material and an outer layer made of a structural polyurethane and wherein a gap for receiving a sensor is defined between the inner reservoir and the outer reservoir.

One preferred feature of the present invention, is to provide such coated underground reservoir for storing liquid products which additionally provides a highly impact resistant coating.

An additional preferred feature of the present invention is to provide such coated underground reservoir for storing liquid products the coating of which can easily be repaired when damages are caused to same during the handling, transportation or installation of the reservoir.

Another additional preferred feature of the present invention, is to provide such coated underground reservoir for storing liquid products the coating material of which presents an excellent electric insulation, a characteristic that is important for the reservoirs designed for storing flammable products.

Another additional preferred feature of the present invention is to provide such coated underground reservoir for storing liquid products whose process of industrialization is extremely clean and non-toxic, for it does not involve toxic solvents or agents.

Still another addition preferred feature of the present invention is to provide such coated underground reservoir for storing liquid products whose process of industrialization is simpler and faster, has less operating steps, and uses less raw materials.

Another preferred feature of the present invention is to provide such coated underground reservoir for storing liquid products, whose process of industrialization uses a small industrial area, without the need of systems for preventing fire and/or for exhausting the gases evolved from toxic agents.

Still another addition preferred feature of the present invention is to provide such coated underground reservoir for storing liquid products whose process of industrialization requires minimum supply of raw materials.

In accordance with a further aspect, the present invention a process for manufacturing an underground reservoir comprising the steps of:

providing an inner, main reservoir; and

covering the outer surface of said main reservoir with a first coating layer consisting of a paper material, and applying a second coating layer and wherein a gap for receiving a sensor is defined between the inner reservoir and the outer reservoir.

Other objects and characteristics of the present invention will be apparent from the following detailed description of the preferred embodiment, taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

Brief Description of the Drawings

The present invention will be additionally described here as follows, as a non-limiting example, with reference to its presently preferred embodiment which is illustrated in the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a side sectional cut view of an underground reservoir for storing liquid products in accordance with the present invention; e

Figure 2 is an expanded side section view of the detail "A" of Figure 1.

Detailed Description of the Preferred Embodiment

A specific embodiment presently preferred of the present invention is illustrated as an example in the accompanying drawings and will be described in details hereinafter. However, it should be understood that though the present invention is susceptible to several modifications and alterations in the form and dimensions, the purpose of the present specification is not to limit same to the particular forms and/or dimensions described herein but, instead, to cover all the modifications and alternative embodiments that are within the spirit and scope of the invention, as defined by the accompanying claims.

With reference now more particularly to the accompanying Figures, in which the same numerals have been used to indicate the same elements in the different views and, with particular reference to Figure 1, the coated reservoir in accordance with the present invention is illustrated as comprising a primary or inner reservoir 1 made from a material having a known strength characteristic, such as carbon steel typically used in the industry.

The reservoir 1 is provided with a pipe 2 for feeding the liquid product to be stored, a pipe 3 for sucking the product stored for distribution, and a well 4 for the buoy (not

shown) of the sensor for detecting the presence of liquid, as well as a check point 5 the purpose of which is to allow for the verification of the integrity of the outer reservoir after it is assembled and even during and after the jacketed reservoir is installed to the place it will be used.

As can be better seen from Figure 2, the primary or inner reservoir 1 is coated with a two-compound material comprising an inner layer 6 made from impervious paper, preferably based on latex, and an outer layer 7 based on pure polyurethane, without the addition of any solvent, which it is applied and cured on the inner paper layer 6.

The process for manufacturing the tank coated in accordance with the present invention is quite simple and will be briefly described hereinafter.

After the main reservoir is constructed in accordance with the traditionally used manufacturing methods in the industries of the sector and, according to the applicable regulations, the same is subjected to a blasting process in specific areas of its outer surface, the purpose of which is to assure the adherence of polyurethane to such areas.

In this step, depending on the type of the sensor for detecting the presence of liquid to be used, the well 4 for the buoy of the sensor should be formed, or in the case of an electronic sensor, the sensor should be installed.

Next, the outer surface area of the main reservoir is covered with impervious latex-based paper to form the inner coating layer 6.

After being coated with paper, the tank is conveyed to a painting station, wherein the outer polyurethane layer 7 is applied through an airless process, until a layer of at least 2.5 mm of thickness is obtained.

After the effective cure of the coating material, tests should be carried out to guarantee the quality and tightness of the application (devices for measuring the thickness of the coating and pneumatically testing in the interstice).

The two-compound coating material resulting from the application of the inner paper layer and the outer polyurethane layer is particularly suitable for the intended purpose, because the paper layer provides the polyurethane with a tensile strength

that this chemical usually does not show, whereas the polyurethane layer provides the paper with a high strength to impacts that could rupture or cut said layer.

Additionally, besides being impervious, said two-compound material of the secondary reservoir is an electrically insulating non-metallic material, thus preventing the possibility of forming a galvanic couple that could speed up the corrosion of the inner reservoir.

The underground reservoir for storing liquid products in accordance with the present invention effectively solves the problems of the coated reservoirs known in the state of the art, thus additionally providing a coating with a high strength to impact, which can easily be repaired when damages are caused to same during the handling, transportation or installation from the reservoir and which presents excellent electric insulation characteristics, which is important to reservoirs designed for storing flammable products.

Also, the industrialization process of the underground reservoir for storing liquid products in accordance with the present invention is extremely clean and non-toxic, for it does not involve the use of toxic solvents or agents, is simpler and faster, has less operating steps, and uses less raw materials.

Additionally, the underground reservoir in accordance with the present invention only needs a small industrial area, without the need of special arrangements against fire and/or toxic agents, with a minimum supply of raw materials.

The best form of realization currently contemplated for the accomplishment of the present invention having been described and illustrated, several modifications and variations in its form of realization will be readily apparent to those skilled in the art. Therefore, it will be understood that the present invention is not limited to the practical aspects of the presently preferred embodiment illustrated and described herein, and that all such modifications and variations should be considered as being encompassed within the spirit and scope of the invention, such as defined in the accompanying claims.

THE CLAIMS DEFINING THE INVENTION ARE AS FOLLOWS:-

1. An underground reservoir for storing liquid products, consisting of an inner, main reservoir, and an outer, secondary reservoir consisting of a coating layer, said coating layer consisting of an inner layer made from a paper material and an outer layer made of a structural polyurethane and wherein a gap for receiving a sensor is defined between the inner reservoir and the outer reservoir.

2. The underground reservoir of claim 1, wherein said paper material is latex-based.

3. The underground reservoir of claim 1, wherein said outer layer made of polyurethane is made without the addition of any solvents.

4. A process for manufacturing an underground reservoir comprising the steps of:

providing an inner, main reservoir; and

covering the outer surface of said main reservoir with a first coating layer consisting of a paper material, and applying a second coating layer and wherein a gap for receiving a sensor is defined between the inner reservoir and the outer reservoir.

5. The process according to claim 4, additionally comprising the step of jet-blasting portions of the outer surface of said main reservoir to enhance the adhesion of said first coating layer.

6. The process according to claim 4, wherein said paper material is a latex-based paper.

7. The process according to claim 4, wherein said second, outer layer made of polyurethane is made without the addition of any solvents.

8. The process according to claim 7, wherein said second outer layer has a minimum thickness of at least 2.5 mm.

9. The underground reservoir of claim 1, wherein the main reservoir is made of carbon steel.

10. The process of claim 4 wherein the main reservoir is made of carbon steel.

11. An underground reservoir substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

12. A process for manufacturing an underground reservoir substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

Dated this thirteenth day of July 2004

Edson Goncalves
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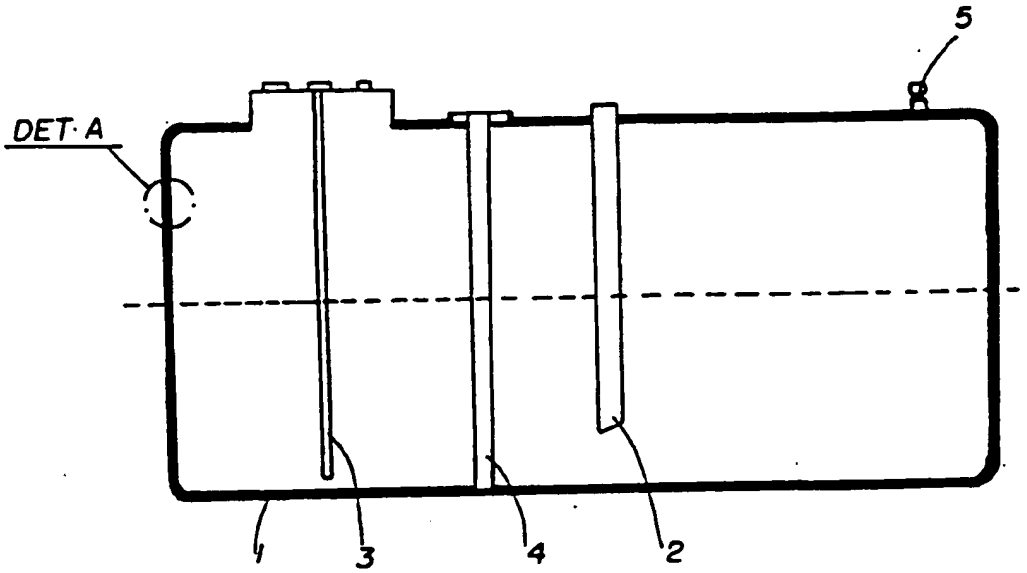
FIG·1



FIG·2
DET·A